**Reading**

The Classical Latin which we are learning was spoken by the Romans. At least we hope so. Rome is the name for both the city and the empire it eventually ruled. Imagine if the US was instead called “the DC”, so that DC was both the heart of the country’s political life and also the name for the country as a whole. Rome was and is located in central Italy.

The traditional and quasi-mythic date for the foundation of Rome is 753BC. This was important to the Roman cultural consciousness in much the same way that 1776 is to us. According to the myth, Rome was founded by twin brothers, Romulus and Remus (you can take a guess as to which one ultimately did the founding).

Romulus and Remus have a very complex family history:

One of the original groups of people who lived in the Italian penninsula was the Latins. Their king was King Numitor and he had a daughter Rhea Silvia. Numitor’s brother steals the throne from him and exiles him, and meanwhile Rhea Silvia gets raped by the god Mars, the god of War. Rhea Silvia gives birth to twins, Romulus and Remus, but Numitor’s brother fears they might one day challenge his right to the throne, so he orders them drowned. The infant twins are saved from drowning in the river by a mother-wolf, who nurses them to health and raises them as her own. When they are older, the twins take back the throne and return it to King Numitor. Then they go off to found their own city.

In the process of founding their new city, the twins have a fight and Romulus commits fratricide, killing his brother Remus. He goes on to build the city, which takes its name, Rome, from him, and invites exiles, criminals, and outcasts to come live there. They do, but they quickly realize that there are no women in the city, and of course no one from the neighboring tribes wanted to marry their daughters to a city full of criminals. So Romulus, in 750BC, invites the Sabines, another local tribe, to a festival, and then the Romans kidnap all the Sabine women and carry them off to Rome to be their wives. This delightful episode in Roman history is called The Rape of the Sabine Women.

In summary, the foundation story of Rome involves a political coup, rape by a god, attempted infanticide, fratricide, a population of unwanted criminals, and mass kidnapping. Later Romans were themselves keenly aware of this history and saw these events as recurring themes in the ongoing story of their country.